Tendency of Language Shift in University Students

Kaleem Ullah[1]*, Simra Arshad [2], Hanata Maryam[3]

Abstract

Language shift is a sociolinguistic phenomenon in which speakers gradually transition from their mother tongue to a more dominant or prestigious language. While extensive research exists on language shift, studies specifically examining university students' tendencies in this regard remain limited. This study aims to explore the inclination toward language shift among university students, particularly those studying in the English department. Employing a quantitative research approach, supported by secondary data from previous studies, the research collects data from 30 university students. Findings reveal that at the initial stages, students engage in code-switching between their mother tongue and English. However, as their proficiency in English increases, they gradually shift from code-switching to complete language shift, predominantly using English in academic and social interactions. Several factors contribute to this transition, including the perceived prestige of English, its role in academic and professional success, and its widespread use in higher education. The study highlights that university students exhibit a strong tendency to replace their native language with English in both formal and informal settings.

The research underscores the implications of this shift, such as potential language erosion and the diminishing use of native languages in academic and professional spheres. Understanding this trend is crucial for educators and policymakers to develop strategies that balance linguistic diversity with the practical advantages of English proficiency. Future research should consider a larger sample size and explore the long-term linguistic and cultural impacts of language shift among students.

Keywords:

Code-Switching, English Language, Language Shift, Mother Tongue, Tendency of Language Shift.

[1]*MPhil English linguistics, Department of English, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur.*
kaleemkhan1431426@gmail.com *Corresponding Author*
[2]*MPhil English linguistics, Department of English, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur.*
samuangel963@gmail.com
[3]*BS English linguistics, Department of English, University of Education, Multan Campus.*
hinatahmaryam6@gmail.com

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Introduction

Language shift occurs at all ages of time. Weinreich (1953) defines language shift as "the change from the habitual use of one language to another" and argues that sociological aspects of a process should be studied as part of contact linguistics. Language shift is the transfer from one language to another.

Language is an archive of societal beliefs and is essential to human identity, norms, and communication. In the current era of globalization and accelerated socio-economic changes, languages frequently face challenges that jeopardize their status and survival. One prominent challenge is language shift, a process in which individuals or communities of a language gradually move from their native language for the sake of any other language. The shift in language occurs for higher social, economic, or political status. University is a place where students from multicultural meet and study together. So, language shift is a phenomenon that is highlighted among university students.

Language shift reflects broader socio-cultural, educational, and economic trends along with linguistic transitions. English, as a global lingua franca, has increasingly dominated educational and professional domains, particularly in multilingual societies. The influence of English has made it a tool for global communication and social advancement, usually at the cost of the native language. In South Asia, there is a significant amount of linguistic diversity. University students prefer the English language, and as a result, the native language is fading in academic and social settings (Rahman, 2002). The preference of language is observed in the daily communication of students. English has become a preferred language for communication, lessening the functional role of their native language. When a community loses its first language and then starts to speak the second acquired language is known as a language shift.

Code-switching is the use of two or more languages in a single conversation. Individuals or communities follow code-switching and then gradually move to the language shift. University students follow the pattern of code-switching to balance the use of mother tongue and dominant language. Code-switching is the outcome of bilingual or multilingual contexts. The frequent use of the English language in social, academic, and professional settings is contributing to the linguistic transition. Then, English is replacing the native language (Poplack, 2001). Code-switching makes a way towards the shift of language. Generally, a language shift happens when the individuals from a semantic local area bit by bit leave their first language and utilize another (Trudgill, 2000).

The implications of language shift extend beyond linguistic boundaries, affecting cultural identity, societal norms, and intergenerational communication. Indigenous languages are carriers of rich cultural heritage and unique worldviews, their decline threatens to homogenize cultural diversity. For university students, this tension between embracing English for global opportunities and preserving their native languages poses critical questions about identity, cultural preservation, and societal values. Graddol (2006) notes that the educational prioritization of English often leads to a linguistic hierarchy, marginalizing indigenous languages and reshaping cultural landscapes.

Literature Review

Language Shift and Its Dynamics

Language shift is a phenomenon in which individuals or communities are in favour of a language instead of the native language. Globalization, economic pressure, and social changes are the reasons for change in the language. Language shift is a broad societal transformation. It includes the change in culture, power dynamics, and beliefs (Fishman, 1991).

The phenomenon of language shift mainly occurs in multi-lingual societies. In multi-lingual settings when the dominant language takes the place of the native language for prestige or socio-economic advancements, known as a language shift. University students shift from their native language to English for academic and professional goals. The generation especially the younger ones who are pursuing their higher studies, plays an essential role in maintaining or shifting the mother tongue. The transition from the mother tongue to a prominent language has become a trend for students in South Asia. The transition is to achieve social and global opportunities (Rahman, 2002). Students are shifting from their mother tongue to the target language for the sake of modernity (Rehman, 2024).

Code-Switching as a Precursor to Language Shift

Code-switching is an initial stage of movement towards language shift. Code-switching is the conversion of one language to another language in a single conversation. Code-switching shares the communicative strategies of bilingual and multilingual speakers Gumperz (1982). English serves as a lingua franca, so code-switching is particular in different contexts.
Code-switching is an identity marker along with linguistic practice. People of a language switch from their mother tongue to the prestige language for the sake of communication, social identity, and relationships. Thus, frequent use of English in formal and informal communication leads to a way to diminish the native language. It contributes to the eventual decline of a native language (Poplack, 1980).

Preference for English in Conversations

The preference for English in communication is a well-documented movement. Many times, English is cherished as a sign of transformation, glory, and worldwide network. In multilingual social orders, English is not only used as a medium of instruction, but it is also a dialect of control and opportunity. For undergraduate students, capability in English is seen as a prerequisite for intellectual prosperity and career progression Kachru (1983).
The dominance of English in instructive and proficient spaces has made linguistics a chain of command, where local dialects are regularly seen as less important Graddol (2006). This discrimination is especially apparent in urban settings, where English overwhelms social and intellectual connections. Observations have shown that students who regularly utilize English in discussions are more likely to experience a progressive change away from their local dialects, as the last mentioned confined to be kept to restricted settings, such as family relations or conventional ceremonies (Phillipson, 1992).

Language Shift in Multilingual Communities

In multilingual social orders, many times the language shift is regularly driven by the socio-economic and political dominance of one dialect over others. Dialect approaches, instruction frameworks, and intergenerational transmission are key variables affecting language shift Hornberger (1998).

From a South Asian point of view, it is highlighted how English has mended native languages in formal and casual domains. This shift is not just a linguistic change, but moreover a reflection of changing social values Rahman (2002). In numerous cases, the selection of English is seen as a procedure for socio-economic versatility, indeed if it comes at the charge of native language conservation.

The Role of Code-Switching in Language Shift

Code-switching serves as a linguistic transaction, where speakers interchange between dialects based on situations, gathering, and intention Myers-Scotton (1993). Among university students, code-switching is regularly a practical choice, reflecting their requirement to adjust

educational desires with social relations. However, the everlasting dependence on a prevailing dialect like English in instructive and proficient settings can lead to its dominance over native dialects Auer (1998).

Code-switching is not only a transitional stage of linguistics but also a potential stimulus for language shift. As students become more comfortable utilizing English in different settings, they slowly decrease their dependence on native languages Poplack (2001). This shift is especially observable in organized communication, where English frequently appears to be the desired medium, indeed among students from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Socio-Cultural Impacts of Language Shift

The socio-cultural results of language shift are significant, specifically for university students who are at the front line of linguistic alteration. Many times, language shift leads to the deprivation of social individuality, as dialect is a key carrier of customs, values, and collective memory Gem (2000). For undergraduate students, the pressure between grasping a worldwide language like English and protecting their native language can make a sense of social disconnection.

The dominance of English as a frame of linguistic colonialism, where native languages are marginalized and depreciated Phillipson (1992). This experience is especially concerning in multilingual social orders, where the shift to English frequently comes about in the destruction of linguistic qualities. For university students, the tendency for English is not only a linguistic choice but also a reflection of broader socio-cultural burdens to integrate into worldwide norms.

The above discussion of literature gives beneficial experiences on language shift and code-switching. By evaluating the variables that drive students to desire English in communication and the part of code-switching in language shift, this discussion points to contribute to the understanding of how linguistic desires are formed by sociocultural, economic, and organizational impacts. Several studies are available on code-switching and language shift however, this study aims to explore the tendency of language shift among university students. And how code-switching leads the way towards language shift will also be explored.

- How much are the students practising code-switching?
- Do students prefer switching English in their conversation?
- How does language shift occur among two different language speakers concerning code-switching?

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the tendency of language shift among university students. It focuses on their preference for switching to English in conversations and the role of code-switching in this phenomenon. The secondary data is also taken from previous research. A quantitative approach is suitable for identifying patterns and relationships within the data. The Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) was used to measure the tendency of students. The students were briefed about the study then a questionnaire was distributed.

Participants

For this study, 30 students from the English department of a university were randomly selected. These students had significant knowledge to understand English in their academic and social contexts.

Data Collection

Data was collected with the help of a structured questionnaire to measure students' preferences, attitudes, and fluency in the English language. The questions were closed-ended in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections:

1. **Language Preferences:** Questions focused on participants' choice of language in academic, professional, and social contexts.
2. **Code-Switching Behavior:** Questions in this section were related to the behaviour of students for switching between English and their native language.
3. **Attitudes Toward English and Native Languages:** Questions in this section were asked to measure the perceptions of students in using the English language.

Data Analysis

In the modern world, English is recognized as a global language. It helps create links between different fields. It is a language of innovation, business and instruction. The data analysis has revealed that college-going students in Pakistan use code-switching frequently and unknowingly with quite ease in their daily conversations. The analysis of data collected from 30 participants showed significant code-switching in academic and social contexts made by students that led to the language shift from the mother tongue to the favoured language.

In the survey, the question was asked about the usage of code-switching by students. The question was, do you frequently use code-switching in your daily lives? The collected data revealed that 44.4% of participants strongly agreed and 14.8% agreed with the statement. A significant number of students switch from their mother tongue to the English language for better communication. Code-switching is a tool to share complex ideas easily. Only 11.11% of students disagreed with the question. These students denied using code-switching in their daily lives. Code-switching makes the conversation easier especially in the case of learning English as a second language. Most of the students are Punjabi speakers and they use code-switching while learning the English language. It revealed that switching from one language to another makes the discussion more fluent and accessible to understand.
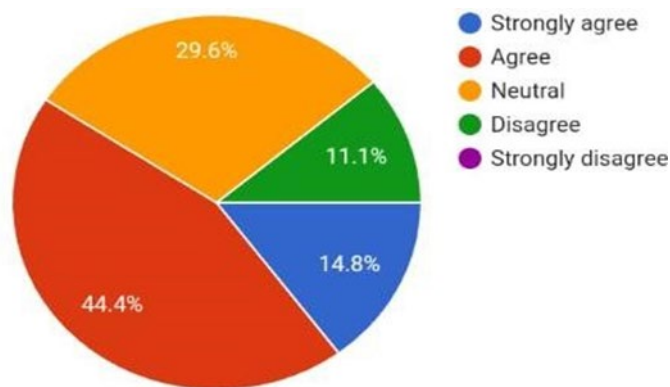
Students feel at ease to share their thoughts by code-switching. The switch between the mother tongue and the English language makes ideas easy to convey and understand. 59.2% of students practice code-switching in their daily lives.

The next question was asked to know the preference to be a monolingual. The question was, do you prefer to speak only one language for communication? 57.7% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. They do not prefer to be monolingual in their communication. Students prefer to be bilingual for communication. Only 11.5% of respondents

agreed with the statement. However, the preference for code-switching is more than to be monolingual. 65.4% of respondents disagreed because they prefer code-switching in their communications. In this way, students prefer code-switching in their daily lives. The conversion of one language to another in a single conversation for better understanding is known as code-switching. A significant number of students prefer code-switching in their daily conversations. This code-switching later serves as a ladder to the language shift.
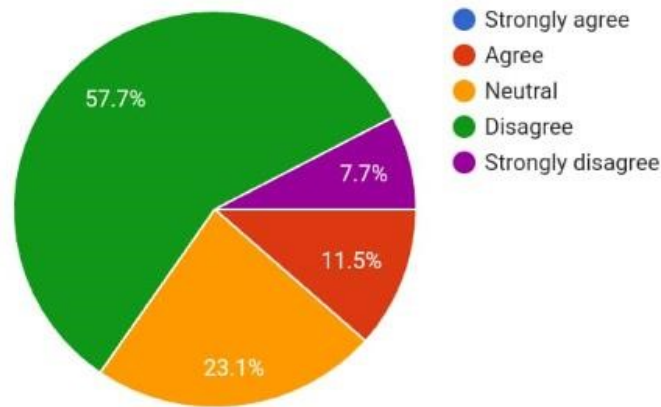
When code-switching becomes a normal switch, it leads the way towards language shift. The native speakers of a language start to shift from their mother tongue and adopt a new and favourable language.

A question was asked, do you prefer to speak the English language? According to the data, 51.9% of respondents prefer to speak the English language to communicate. 63% respondents prefer to speak English language in their communication over their mother tongue. In the current era, the English language is more favourable. Students prefer to speak in the English language. Sometimes, for better understanding they prefer code-switching but most of them want to speak the English language.
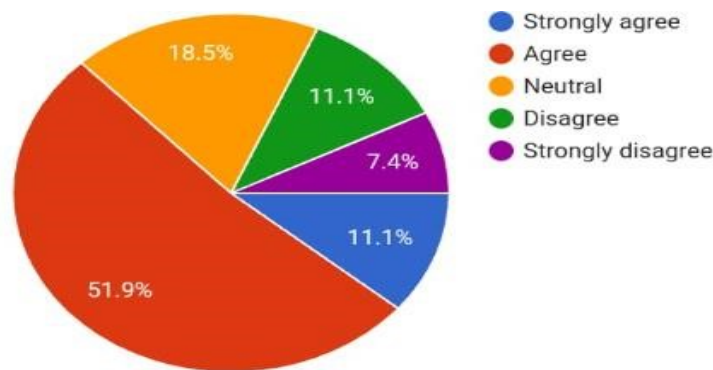
The preference for learning and speaking the English language leads to code-switching and later to the language shift. The students shift from their mother tongue to the English language. Students have a high potential to shift from their mother tongue.

It is observed that students prefer to speak the English language. Mostly, students who are not proficient in the English language, want to switch between their mother tongue and the English language. Here, code-switching is a key element. It makes communication easier and to understandable. Later, when students become proficient in the English language, they do not speak their mother tongue openly. Code-switching paves the way towards language shift. Then, students prefer to speak the English language during formal or informal contexts. University

students have a favourable attitude towards the English language when they become proficient in it.

The secondary data from previous research shows that students do not want to speak their mother tongue in their daily communications. Punjabi speakers mostly feel inferior in speaking their mother tongue. They say English is a prestige language and it ensures better living and earnings.

It is summarized that a significant number of university-going students prefer code-switching in their conversations. The students who are not fluent in the English language prefer code-switching for better conveying of message. Code-switching helps us understand complex ideas and share meaningful thoughts. And students deliberately switch to the English language. If a student is proficient in the English language, then a language shift can also take place. Students have a favourable attitude towards the English language. They want to learn and speak the English language. Concerning code-switching two different language speakers can shift to the modern language. In the early stages of learning a new language, code-switching helps the learners to understand the rules of language. Furtherly, when students become efficient in the target language, they shift from their mother tongue. The movement from their tongue to the target language is known as language shift. It is seen that, at the university level students have favourable attitudes towards the English language and language shift occurs at a large scale.

Conclusion

It is concluded that code-switching leads the way towards language shift. University students prefer code-switching in their early stages of learning a new language. As they learn the English language as a target language. At basic levels, they prefer code-switching between their mother tongue and the English language. Later, when they become efficient in the English language these students prefer to speak the English language. They move from their mother or native language to the English language. This language shift is common at universities that take place for a better future and modernity. Students prefer language shift to gain a good job and international representation.

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